

THE GOVERNOR'S FAMILY VIOLENCE COUNCIL'S OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR ABUSER INTERVENTION PROGRAMS IN MARYLAND

PURPOSE

The purpose of these Guidelines is to promote victim safety by establishing minimum operating standards for Abuser Intervention Programs (AIP) in Maryland. In order to receive court-ordered referrals AIPs must certify to local courts their compliance with these Guidelines.

Minimum operating standards contained in these Guidelines are intended to accomplish the following:

- establish program responsibility to victims and accountability to courts;
- ensure referral of abusers to intervention programs that focus on stopping abuse and preventing abusers from evading or minimizing their responsibility for abusive behavior;
- ensure AIPs participate in a coordinated approach to ending intimate partner violence that involves a partnership with the legal community and victim advocacy programs at the local and state level; and
- ensure outreach to victims.

1.0 PROGRAM CERTIFICATION

An AIP seeking court-ordered referrals shall certify compliance with these Guidelines to the Governor's Family Violence Council.

The Family Violence Council recommends that administrative offices of local courts develop a process to receive certification from AIPs and, on an annual basis, compile and distribute to judges within the jurisdiction a list of AIPs that have been certified.

Programs interested in obtaining certification should contact the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention for information on the next certification cycle.

2.0 DEFINITION OF ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR AS IT OCCURS IN INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

For the purpose of these Guidelines and as a reference for AIPs, intimate partner violence is defined as follows:

Any criminal offense where the offender and the victim are or have been married, in an intimate relationship, including dating and same sex relationships, or have a child together, or where the victim qualifies for a protective order or an intimate partner peace order.

Abusive behavior in intimate partner violence is defined as follows:

- *Abuse is a pattern of coercive control directed toward the victim.*
- *Abusive behavior involves the use of physical harm, emotional harm, or intimidation to control the victim's thoughts, feelings or actions.*
- *Abusive behavior results in a living environment of fear which infringes upon the victim's basic rights and freedoms.*

2.1 Abusive behavior may consist of the following:

A. Deliberate use of physical force or threat to use physical force to harm another.

- *Specific behaviors include, but are not limited to: hitting, pushing, strangling, biting, scratching, pinching, restraining, slapping, pulling, hitting with weapons or objects, shooting, stabbing, damaging property or pets, or threatening to do one of these acts.*

B. Verbal and emotional forms of assault and control, such as stalking, intimidation, coercion, threats, or degradation.

- *Specific behaviors include, but are not limited to: name calling, insults, labeling, threats, blaming, and humiliating actions to diminish the victim's sense of self-worth.*

C. Economic forms of control.

- *Specific behaviors include but are not limited to: withholding or denying access to money or other basic resources, and sabotaging employment, housing or educational opportunities.*

D. Sexual abuse, assault or coercion.

- *Specific behaviors are those intended to have the effect of intimidation or harm in a sexual manner, including but not limited to: unwanted touching, voyeurism, sexual degradation, and rape.*

E. Social isolation.

- *Specific behaviors include, but are not limited to: denying communication with friends or family members, prohibiting access to transportation and telephone, and other possessive or jealous behaviors.*

F. Failure to comply with immigration requirements, making an immigrant spouse unable to work and vulnerable to deportation and/or loss of child custody.

2.2 Responsibility for abusive behavior

The abuser bears sole responsibility for his or her actions. Substance abuse or emotional problems do not diminish responsibility for abusive behavior.

3.0 OPERATING STANDARDS

AIPs must certify compliance with the following standards in order to be included in the Family Violence Council's recommended program list.

3.1 Victim Confidentiality

- A. The AIP shall maintain the confidentiality of victims unless specifically waived by the victim or it is determined by the AIP that there is reason to believe the victim may be in imminent danger.
- B. The AIP shall inform victims upon initial contact that they are required by law to report incidents of child abuse to local authorities and to inform the police if they have reason to believe there is imminent danger to others as a result of the abuser's violent behavior.

- C. Files on victims shall be maintained separately from files on abusers. AIPs should not maintain files on victims unless the files are protected by the confidentiality privilege of a licensed supervisor.

3.2 Intake Process

- A. The AIP shall indicate to the court or court monitor if a referred person is assessed as not being amenable to the program's services and, to the extent feasible, make appropriate recommendations.
- B. The AIP shall submit a report to the court or the court monitor if someone ordered to attend the program fails to contact the program, within either one month or the response time ordered by the court, whichever is shorter.
- C. The AIP shall make every effort to offer a screening and intake appointment within ten (10) business days of the referred person's contact with the program.
- D. The AIP shall develop a history and profile of the abuser's violent behavior based on descriptions from criminal justice agencies, the victim(s), treatment programs, and other relevant persons or agencies.

The AIP shall require the abuser to provide the following information:

- Full name;
- Address;
- Victim's name and available contact information;
- History of substance abuse;
- History of mental/behavioral health, including diagnoses, hospitalizations, treatment and medications;
- Assessment for homicidal or suicidal threats or ideation;
- Description of referring incident;
- Information on possession and access to weapons, and any history of threat or actual use of weapons;

The AIP is encouraged to obtain the following information from the victim(s), court(s), and/or abuser:

- Employment and income information
- Current partner name and available contact information;
- Copy of the criminal or civil intimate partner violence record; and
- Copy of the police report, statement of charges, and petitions for protective orders.

- E. The AIP shall secure a waiver of confidentiality from the abuser to allow communication with the victim and, if possible, the current partner and all previous partners with whom the participant has children about incidents of abuse and the abuser's participation in the program. The AIP will attempt to provide information to victims about services available to maintain safety, as well as educational and counseling resources.

- F. The AIP shall either provide or refer abusers for treatment services to address factors contributing to the abusive behavior. The AIP will secure from the abuser a reciprocal release of information to allow for an exchange of information with relevant service providers.
- G. A contract, specifying the responsibilities of both the AIP and the abuser shall be signed. The contract shall, at a minimum, reflect the following:
- Duration of the program;
 - Agreement on fee rate and payment requirements;
 - Agreement to stop all forms of violence;
 - Agreement to refrain from drug and alcohol use while in attendance at group meetings; and
 - Conditions resulting in program non-compliance and the consequences thereof.

3.3 Victim Safety

- A. The AIP shall send information about local resources available to the victim unless the victim has asked not to be contacted. This list of resources shall include, but is not limited to,:
- Legal services
 - Emergency shelter
 - Counseling services
 - 24-Hour hotline
 - Children's therapeutic resources
- B. The AIP shall provide information about the effectiveness of AIPs in general and, if available, their own specific AIP.
- C. The AIP shall attempt to inform the victim about the abuser's attendance unless the victim requests not to be informed. When contact information is available, at least three attempts should be made to reach the victim by phone. Effort should be made to vary the time and day of the attempts in order to increase the likelihood of contact. All efforts should be documented.
- D. The AIP shall evaluate the abuser's lethality and warn victims determined to be at high risk. The AIP shall establish a "duty to warn" procedure directing staff to warn the victim and/or notify the police if a direct threat is made against the victim or other person.

Best Practice Recommendation:

- ✓ When resources and contact information is available the AIP should attempt to make 3, 6, 9, and 12 month follow-up interviews with the victim in addition to the required initial contact.
- ✓ When resources and contact information is available the AIP should attempt to reach every participant's current partner.
- ✓ AIP services will be delivered in facilities with attention to the safety of victims.
- ✓ Matters to be attended to are separation of victims from offenders in waiting areas and procedures to minimize the possibility of a particular victim having unwanted or unexpected contact with his/her offender. Conjoint or family meetings/ sessions will be conducted in areas and facilities with proper security including presence of other staff nearby, appropriate alarm systems, etc.

3.4 Program Format

- A. All AIP group members shall be referred or volunteer based on an incident or history of perpetrating intimate partner violence. Cases solely involving other types of conflict (i.e., child abuse, road rage, violence between siblings, etc.) should not be included in and are not appropriate for AIP sessions.
- B. Group members should be of the same gender. Male and female participants should be separated by group in order to emphasize the distinct issues and motivations of that gender.
- C. Program curriculum will be predominantly focused on issues of intimate partner violence.
- D. Programs will meet a minimum requirement of 32 hours of group time extended over at least 20 weeks. If providing individual sessions the program must be a minimum of 16 meeting hours extended over at least 12 weeks.

Best Practice Recommendation:

- ✓ Programs may include additional information in their curriculum that addresses issues faced by participants such as, but not limited to, responsible fathering, child abuse prevention and substance abuse information.
- ✓ To provide sufficient victim support a relationship with each participants' Parole or Probation Agent should be established and maintained.
- ✓ Programs should make every effort to maintain a group size of ten to twelve members based on an ideal setting for adult learning.
- ✓ Group format is preferred unless extenuating circumstances prevents an individual from participating in the group setting (e.g., disability, language barriers, sexual orientation, etc.)

4.0 DISCHARGE CRITERIA

The contract signed by the abuser and the AIP shall specify criteria for discharge from the program.

4.1 Program Completion

- A. Participants shall be considered to have completed the program upon fulfilling the requirements set forth in the program contract.
- B. If a participant perpetrates a new, documented incident of abuse the AIP will re-evaluate the case and a new service plan and discharge requirements may be created.

4.2 Program reporting responsibilities

- A. The AIP shall notify the referring court, corrections, probation or other court monitor of the abuser's attendance and participation and, to the extent feasible, make appropriate recommendations.

- B. The AIP shall notify the victim of the abuser's completion of or termination from the program, unless the victim requests not to be informed. Notification shall include, at a minimum, whether the abuser has complied with the court order. The AIP shall advise the victim that program completion cannot guarantee her safety and may not reduce abusive behaviors.

5.0 PROGRAM STAFFING

- A. Staff employed by the AIP shall be violence free in their own lives. No AIP shall hire an individual who has been an intimate partner abuser unless the program director is satisfied that the prospective staff member has successfully completed a certified AIP and has since remained violence free for a minimum of three years.
- B. Staff employed by the AIP shall not use alcohol or drugs to an extent or in a manner that is determined to impair the individual's ability to function in a responsible, professional manner.
- C. The AIP shall strive to employ staff members who reflect the cultural diversity of community being served, provide services to culturally diverse groups, and comply with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- D. Volunteers and intern staff must be supervised on site at all times by a paid staff member.
- E. Participants who complete the program and are invited to serve as mentors or facilitators in the program will always be supervised by a paid staff member while on site.
- F. Minimum education requirements:
- At least one of the group facilitators in every group session must have a minimum of a Bachelors' level human service degree.
 - Every program must have an individual with a Masters' level clinical license that can provide supervision for program staff.
 - Intake staff without advanced degrees must be supervised by a staff member with a minimum of a Bachelors' degree in a human service field.
 - Within six months of hire all group facilitators and individual counselors must have a minimum of 30 hours of training from a comprehensive intimate partner violence victim service agency, as defined by Code of Maryland Regulations, on dynamics of intimate partner violence and its effects on children. Until this requirement is met the staff person shall not facilitate a session alone.
 - Before facilitating or co-facilitating any group sessions all group facilitators and individual counselors must have a minimum of 30 hours of training specific to working with perpetrators of intimate partner violence from an abuser intervention program certified in its state. The program providing training does not have to be certified in Maryland but must be certified in the state it resides.

Best Practice Recommendation:

- ✓ Requirements or recommendations should be established for a training plan for all new AIP staff.
- ✓ Requirements or recommendations should be established for a continuing education plan for all AIP staff.
- ✓ Co-facilitation is recommended for safety reasons and to prevent unintended collusion with participants. Additionally, the use of both male and female facilitators can provide positive models of interaction between genders.

6.0 COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

All programs will make reasonable and prudent attempts to create working relationships with the following community resources:

- Intimate partner violence victim services as defined by the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) within the program's jurisdiction or county. Services must include shelter, legal services, and a 24 hour hotline/helpline.
- Mental health – Programs must have a policy demonstrating a screening process and protocol for addressing issues of mental health and a list of local service providers.
- Substance Abuse – Programs must have a policy demonstrating a screening process and protocol for addressing issues of mental health and a list of local service providers certified by the Alcohol & Drug Abuse Administration.
- Intimate partner violence Coordinating Council - The program or a representative of its agency will attend at least half of the meetings scheduled by its local Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (DVCC) annually
- Parole & Probation – Provide a minimum of monthly updates on participants supervised by the Division of Parole & Probation.

Best Practice Recommendation:

- ✓ Other organizations programs may consider engaging include:
 - The Maryland Abuser Intervention Collaborative (MAIC)
 - The Governor's Family Violence Council
 - The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV)
 - Community resources that can provide supportive services such as employment assistance, parenting classes, housing assistance, responsible fatherhood support groups, etc.